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BY

J. MADISON TAYLOR, A.B., M.D.
PHILADELPHIA, PA.

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THE NEGRO AND HIS HEALTH PROBLEMS.*

By J. MADISON TAYLOR, A.B., M.D.,

PHILADELPHIA, PA.

THE negro problem is one of anthropology, not of ethics, religion or variegated opinions. It does involve grave sub-problems of humanity, economics, and common sense. Under no circumstances should it be complicated by emotion. The whole race problem, in the final count, resolves itself into what is to become of the members of an alien people transported, by force and suddenly, to an unsuitable, a hostile environment.

Members of this alien race deserve the same consideration as those of any other: no more, no less. They will get it, and all the more readily if partizanship, unreflecting zeal and politics can be kept upon a rational level. Prejudices for and against the negro neutralize each other. They only serve to obscure fundamental issues, producing no good, but only loss of vitality and moral tone in those who entertain them.

The question for solution resolves itself into *whether members of a tropical race, evolved through thousands of years in hot countries, whose characteristics have gradually become adapted to local*

*Read at the annual meeting of the American Climatological Society, Hartford, Conn., June 11, 1912.

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climatic conditions, are capable of flourishing or even surviving in a climate wholly at variance with the circumstances of their racial adaptations.† If the answer is in the affirmative then is opened a host of doubts as to the validity of all experience, history and the findings of anthropologic science; also complex questions arise as to what will become of the race till time, the greatest solver of problems, shall reveal. If the query above proposed is answered in the negative we should at once consider what can be done to effect a transference of the negroes to a suitable habitat.

Two or more races brought into intimate contact socially and domestically evolve hybrids. All experience shows that hybrids, the product of sexual union of antithetic races, such as the white and the black, are inferior to the original stock physically and morally. It is demonstrated by well-attested facts that these hybrids of black and white are vastly more susceptible to certain infections; their moral as well as physical stamina is lower than that of either original race. Undoubtedly there are individual exceptions.

Hybridism lowers normal defenses to degenerative diseases, hence inhibition, the fundamental safeguard, is lessened and degenerative processes then proceed with increasingly rapid strides as the alien blood weakens and the stronger influences prevail. In America the supply of the original negro blood is limited; no new infusions are to be expected.

Meanwhile, pure streams of our Anglo-Saxon, Slavic, Celtic and other blood, infused as they are

†Another important anthropological problem is whether a people practically in or near a state of savagery can be expected to become civilized or conform to civilized standards within the short space of a few hundred years. This, however, is not germane to the present inquiry.

in the United States with a different, but not largely variant, group of Latins, Hebrews, and others, are polluted by the negroid blood. However, those who feel alarm at this fact can take comfort from the reflection that it is contrary to all precedent for a tropic race (so entirely unfit to subsist in a cold climate like ours) to survive more than ten, or at most fifteen, generations. Our subtropical summers may prolong survival more or less.

Education for the negro during emancipation days and long thereafter was slow to receive adequate attention. Race prejudice took on almost unbelievable phases, among which was opposition by the Southern whites to providing adequate opportunities for equivalent education.

Slowly but surely these difficulties are being adjusted. It is a splendid testimony to the inherent good sense of the negro, to his capacities for swift regeneration, that the chief impetus for education (after General Armstrong pointed the way) arose among, and is sustained by, his own people. They are learning, too, that the form and character of this education must be specialized, simplified, along lines of primitive needs, industrial and agricultural. The fundamental requisite is the inculcation of laws of right living, the basis of which is the mutual sharing of responsibilities provided by family life. Domestic hygiene once taught in the schools promptly and radically regenerates that of the household.

Since the manumitted slave is essentially a bankrupt, without capital, all he has to exchange for a livelihood is his ability to work.

In this work he begins as a mere assistant in production, but may then attain to any height of endeavor for which the individual is fitted or on which he is capable of specializing.

Physical fitness is the *sine qua non* to comfortable as well as useful existence. The problem of health of such an individual is thereupon demonstrated to be paramount.

No line of endeavor is capable of accomplishing so much as one which furnishes opportunities to the wage-earner for learning how to maintain personal health at a maximum.

This one central thought must be kept in mind by all who endeavor to solve health problems of the negro. No race which has evolved slowly and acquired definite physical characteristics can be transplanted suddenly to wholly alien conditions, climatic or other, and adjust themselves to these new and trying conditions, except through a period sufficiently long and by slow evolution.

The negro is an essential part of the body politic. Health problems of the Afro-American stand close to those of all other citizens.

Ten million human beings, differing in racial characteristics, yet closely interwoven with others socially and domestically, demand critical observation. While valuable aids, they are also serious menaces. During the period of enslavement physical conditions were vastly better. There is so much evidence nowadays of deterioration among negroes, induced by the effects of unaccustomed freedom, that the question of their betterment constitutes a vital part of national economics.*

Throughout the length and breadth of our Southern States, and to a lesser degree elsewhere, negroes

*I myself was a slave-owner, living in boyhood on a plantation. My having then and now much to do with the black peoples may qualify me to express more accurate and just opinions than those who have had no such actual experience.

constitute a large ethnic factor. Among them are splendid personalities, yet the majority lack elements of stability, of dependableness. They are too often their own worst enemies, deficient in fixity of purpose, in judgment, in those reliable characteristics which fit them for citizenship. Intellectually and morally they resemble children. When, unfortunately, they became a political issue, endless complications arose. Scholastic opinions circulated by ignorant, often venal, meddlers, insisting upon vague altruistic plans, created a chaos on which too little practical light has as yet been shed. Forces are now at work which may solve the more urgent perplexities.

The negro is too often a creature of impulse, of emotion, of shallow impressionability, and swayed overmuch by mere physical promptings. He is a good imitator, which constitutes a valuable equipment for certain kinds of usefulness. Along with these adolescent qualities there are frequently to be found individuals of keen intelligence, good moral perception, faithfulness to friends, and of deeply religious feeling.

When unmarred by damaging environment, ill-usage or vitiating influences, the negro is a far more reliable citizen than are some Europeans. It will be generally admitted by those not steeped in prejudices that the unspoiled negro is oftentimes a most estimable, lovable person. The vitiated negro is, however, a peculiarly uncertain, explosive and dangerous creature. It is safe to assume that had the process of emancipation progressed more slowly along the lines of intelligently guided evolution the negro population would now constitute a more valuable group of citizens. Unfortunately he became a political bone of contention and was suddenly pro-

jected unprepared as an equal upon society from the position of an hereditary dependent, unprovided with knowledge or training for the next social phase, viz., that of a free and responsible factor in the Commonwealth. The confusion into which he was forced by the period of Reconstruction (the product of a devastating war waged largely in his behalf) created many complications making for physical decrepitude.

Accustomed for generations to dependency, to serf-like conditions, to paternal harboring; or, on the other hand, subjected to occasional cruel, reasonless injustice, there is little wonder that one so constituted fell promptly under the sway of evil influences, of temptations, became often licentious, brutal, or savagely retroactionary. The mischief-making, self-seeking "carpet-bagger" found in him a tool ready to his hand; and "rum, rapine, and rebellion ran riot." Industries were then paralyzed, reorganization was slow and imperfect, the whole local social fabric suffered, the burdens falling heavy enough upon all, but most crushingly on the crude, plastic, unformed negroid element.

To-day a deplorable condition of affairs prevails among these alien racial elements of the community. Many of our duties to them are not yet adequately defined, nor are the factors yet precisely determinable. All will become plain as prejudices on both sides subside and self-seeking politics finally gives way to statesmanship. The solution can only be by patient, tolerant compromises, always utilizing the principles of critical science and true Christianity to guide our decisions.

Solution of the health problems of the negro would seem to be particularly significant and urgent, so intimately interwoven are they with the indus-

trial. The most obvious need is for education of the young in principles of citizenship. No remedy can exceed in value implanting the seeds of self-respect, of industry, of responsibility, of obedience to constituted authority. The most urgent measure is for legislators to control the sale and distribution of delirifacient poisons. Bad as the vitiated negro is, he is an angel of light in his original state compared to any negro crazed by alcohol, cocaine or morphia.

This is the one insistent factor that for the moment overwhelms and obscures all others. Remove or reduce to determinable limitations the accessibility to narcotics and the residue can be dealt with by reasonable means. In establishing punitive measures against free access to alcohol and narcotics some innocent persons will doubtless suffer with the guilty, i.e. a few free-born whites may be deprived of their Heaven-sent privilege of going to Hades in the fashion of their choice. This indirect "injustice" or "evil," if such it be, can be endured if only adequate restrictive legislation shall be ultimately secured and enforced.

The proposition would seem thus placed directly up to the voter and the legislator.

Under slavery the health of the negro was peculiarly good, well in advance of the rest of the community. Tuberculosis was then practically unknown among the blacks. In comparing their status then and now something may be conceded to the whole group of aggravating conditions then prevailing, compounded of ignorance, defective instincts, laziness, improvidence, morbid optimism, effects of poverty and the like. All these factors, however, are, at their worst, little things compared to mental and moral vitiation through the destructive effects of

narcotic poisons. These bear heavily on collateral health problems; *e.g.* susceptibility to tuberculosis, whereto the negroes are shown to be now three times as liable as the whites.*

Are we now as a nation prepared to deal efficiently with these obviously crucial, though deeply entrenched abuses? How can the paramount significance of his proposition be brought to the consciousness of our citizens?

The negro of the rural sections of the South is now, according to the evidence, in a far better condition of health and morals than the negro of the cities. My personal observation is at the present time chiefly of the urban colored population, far north of their normal habitat. Here a deplorable state exists, part of which is due to natural causes, chiefly climatic. It is far worse than among those races which, through generations of selection and specialization, have become adjusted to urban confinement and restraint. Especially is this true of the Hebrews, who by long evolution have acquired relative immunity to many infections, and resistance to the effects of depressing influences. It will require no less than many centuries for the negro to become adjusted to cold climates. He is unfit racially to flourish above the latitude of Mason and Dixon's Line. All those who know the facts urge that the negro shall never attempt to remain above the line of the Carolinas. Unless the negro is endowed with inherent potentialities radically different from those of all other tropical races, he will deteriorate and perish in cold climates. Just as the Northern races, like the Goths and Vandals, who conquered Southern Europe, deteriorated and disappeared in a few

*See "Tuberculosis in the Negro," by Seale Harris, M.D.

generations, so will any weaker race from the hot South disappear in the North.

The negro is essentially a creature fitted to dwell in wide spaces under the vault of heaven. He must have access to the sun. He is not to be expected, at least not for many generations, to labor so regularly or so continually as one less recently in a savage state. Good work he can do; but those who know him well are aware that the incentives to do his best are not the same as for the Hebrew, the Celt, Slav, German or Italian. Long monotony, confinement, deprivation of normal solaces to his semi-savage spirit induce gloom, revolt, explosions of retroactive impulses. He needs praise, kindly encouragement, personal solicitude and direction, and will then often surpass himself. Fortunately, he is growing ambitious to copy the best in the methods of those about him, and will succeed, provided he is aided by wise, firm and kindly guidance. The negro has become more or less of a political power and it is fortunate that in his views, opinions and decisions his guides are usually the clergy of his own race. It is fortunate that these colored pastors are, in the main, good men, clear-sighted, aware of the gravity of their position, their unique power. Many of them seem fortified by dignity, self-respect, and conscientiousness. They exhibit a deeper interest in the personal welfare, and especially the mental and moral training of their flocks than do those of many other religious bodies. The danger is that too many of them are not men of broad views, with minds above mere financial considerations in the administration of church economics. They are often insufficiently alive to physical or hygienic needs, especially ventilation, temperance and wholesome living. My personal ex-

perience with certain of these pastors is most disappointing. They exhibit a degree of narrowness, of selfishness, greatly to be deplored. It is almost impossible to impress some of them with their paramount duty to advise their congregations to seek the country, especially the warm countries, where alone they are racially fitted to flourish—even to survive. Fortunately there is now a large and growing body of negro physicians, dentists and pharmacists.*

It is obviously through education in right feeling, thinking, and doing that any considerable advances can be effected in the ultimate evolution of the black race. The basis of this advance is to encourage in all ways wholesome instincts; to make the integrity of the family the point of departure for all effort, all rewards.

Purity of race is always of paramount value. Hybridism leads to all sorts and degrees of constitutional vitiation. Autochthony is an important condition of racial advance. Before freedom the negro was a chattel, and whether the progeny was white or black, it was equally utilizable. The admixture of a highly cultivated white male with the more simply organized black female produced then a superior article of commerce, a greater promise of available capacity in the product.

The autochthony of the black race is better assured since freedom, because marital alliances can now be at least more stable. Marriage with whites

*There recently met in Baltimore a national association of these professions, with a membership of three hundred, and two thousand colored men are practising medicine and the allied professions in the United States. Much may be expected from these educated and enlightened persons which will redound to the essential betterment of the race.

is rare and forms a negligible ethnic factor. This state of familial stability is to be welcomed and if assured it will make for racial betterment.

Hybrids are of proverbially low resisting power to morbid agencies, physical and psychical. This is particularly true of the mulatto and other grades of negroid admixture. The pure blood negro holds the mulatto in deep contempt.

The negro is essentially domestic, and while by no means so conscientious in sexual matters as some races, often exhibits commendable capabilities for faithfulness.*

Vagrant tendencies were exaggerated "before the war" by divers causes, the chief of which was the power of the owner to dispose of slaves diversely.

All over the South schools and colleges for the negro are being established, most of them through the initial impulses emanating from Hampton, Fiske, and Tuskegee. Also far-seeing, benevolent men and women of the North are giving of their time, strength, and means to this incomparable object.

*An important observation made by several Southern physicians is to the effect that sexual lawlessness, resulting in lynchings, is to be explained thus: The male negro is nearly always infected with gonorrhea. He neglects treatment habitually. Chronic prostatic irritation ensues. Thus sexual impulses frequently become overmastering. Alcohol particularly inflames this state and likewise dethrones reason; hence the first female he meets he is tempted to assault. This if often a white female; thereupon the fury and vengeance of white men are excited and disastrous results follow to the negro.

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